CONNECTICUT FOOD POLICY COUNCIL
State of Connecticut
Department of Agriculture

Statement of Linda Drake, Chair of the CT Food Policy Council, before the Appropriations Committee, February 17, 2009

I am here today to urge you to deny the recommendation of House Bill 6375 to eliminate the existence of the CT Food Policy Council. The Council was established by the Legislature in 1997 and charged with advising both the Governor and the General Assembly on issues of food security in our state and on legislation that may affect the state's overall food system.

Food policy addresses concerns such as: farmland preservation, urban agriculture, emergency food supplies, markets for local food, nutrition education, food safety, child nutrition, food assistance programs and inner-city supermarkets. Food policy links economic development, land use planning, environmental protection and preservation, farming, national security, health, economic and urban issues.

Our work is about good government. The Connecticut Food Policy Council provides a unique opportunity for representatives of state agencies and private organizations to discuss issues and to develop policies and government actions that influence the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and safety of our food supply.

The Council is formally housed within the State Department of Agriculture. Members include Commissioners or designees from the state departments of Agriculture, Administrative Services, Education, Social Services, Transportation, and Public Health, as well as representatives from agriculture, anti-hunger programs, the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and the retail and wholesale food industry.

We work across departmental boundaries to identify ways we can collaborate, breaking down bureaucratic barriers to accomplish the goal of food security for all Connecticut residents. There is no one easy answer to the issues of food security — improving it is a multi-stakeholder process, with implications across many industry sectors. It takes insight, involvement and a willingness to look at solutions in a new light.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to create a Food Policy Council to "develop, coordinate and implement a food system policy." More than 30 other states have followed our example in creating food policy councils.

The Council has a strong record of accomplishments over the past 12 years and has done its work with minimal state funding. The new Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, outlined his proposals for federal action last week and called for establishing state food policy councils across the country.

While we recognize that in a time of fiscal austerity the state may not be able to fund the Council, we believe that it would be a serious error to eliminate its existence as proposed by the Governor in House Bill 6375. We urge you to keep the Council in existence. Some of its work can continue on a voluntary basis and with the interest of this new Secretary of Agriculture we may find that federal funding will be available to the states for food policy councils. Food is essential for life. We take it for granted, and we shouldn't. Connecticut needs to stay committed to addressing food security issues. My submitted testimony includes more detail and examples of accomplishments of the CT Food Policy Council.

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WORK OF THE CONNECTICUT FOOD POLICY COUNCIL -1997 T0 2009

- Connecticut was the first to establish a state Food Policy Council. Since then more than 30 other states have followed our example. Connecticut's work has achieved national recognition. In 2006, the National Conference of State Legislators brought legislators from throughout the Northeast to Connecticut to see the work of the CT Food Policy Council in action.

- The Council has always done its work with minimal state funding, at the level of $25,000 annually over the past few years.

- In 2006 **Home Plate: Putting Local Food on the Menu**, our conference for food service managers, chefs, restaurants, farmers, and dietitians from the public and private sectors identified significant issues about producing and marketing local foods in Connecticut. This has led to a major statewide initiative on meat processing.

- Plans to link eligibility for state assistance programs have resulted in more people getting food, more efficiently. Collaborations forged through the Food Policy Council have helped shorten the application for Food Stamps and improved linkages to the School Lunch and Breakfast programs.

- The farmland preservation program has been re-energized. The state's goal to preserve 130,000 acres of farmland had lost momentum with no farmland preserved at all during 1999. The Council's **Save the Land** Conference resulted in the creation of the Working Lands Alliance. Today the state is moving more directly to preserve prime farmland.

- Changes to bid processes have increased opportunities for local food wholesalers.
  Due to their involvement with the Food Policy Council, the University of Connecticut addressed an issue that was preventing Connecticut food wholesalers from bidding on University contracts — a "sole source" policy that gave all of the University's food supply business to one vendor. Eliminating this requirement helps locally-owned businesses compete for University food supply contracts.

- Improved access to food for seniors, urban, and low-income residents.
  Interdepartmental collaboration has resulted in several projects designed to improve access to food for Connecticut residents. The Department of Agriculture and Department of Social Services have expanded the Food Stamp program to include coupons for use by senior citizens at Farm Markets. The Food Policy Council also co-sponsored a public hearing, Barriers to Food Access in Connecticut, in March 2000 with State Rep. Barnaby Horton and the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy. The hearing focused on a long-standing food problem in Connecticut, the lack of full-size, affordably priced supermarkets in or near low-income communities and the related issues of transportation.

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- The Council collaborated with the Department of Transportation to produce the **Connecticut Farm Map** in 2002 a road-map guide to local produce. This very popular map that helps consumers and farm businesses was revised and reissued in 2005.
- In collaboration with the Department of Education, we produced **What's Cooking in Connecticut Schools,** with ideas for communities to help improve nutrition and physical fitness for Connecticut's children.

- The Council has produced substantive reports on **Food Security in Connecticut, Agricultural Directions in CT** and **Community Food Security in CT**, with a ranking of each of our 169 Towns.

- The Council's **Nutrition Education Summit** brought together leaders in the field of food and nutrition education to seek ways to enhance collaboration and work more effectively to address nutritional concerns of our families and kids. As a result of that conference, we created a new website for nutrition educators.

- The Council's **Food Safety** conference addressed the issue of consumer confidence that the food we are purchasing is safe to eat. This is a key ingredient in a secure food system. A result of the conference was the Council's recommendations to: increase the production and consumption of locally-produced food; examine the issue of labeling genetically-modified foods; coordinate and standardize food safety regulations; and further examine the consumer's role in food safety.

More information is available at the website of the Connecticut Food Policy Council
www.foodpc.state.ct.us

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